THE DECORATION OF THE NEW HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT.

THE fifth report of the commissioners appointed for the promotion of the fine arts in England, contains nothing but what is already known. The appendix, like a lady's postscript, is the most valuable part of the document. The commissioners adhere to the original recommendation that the six arched compartments in the House of Lords should be decorated with fresco-paintings.

"We are, however, of opinion that it would be desirable to proceed gradually with the execution of the fresco paintings, and that one should be completed before others are commenced; there would thus be an opportunity of judging of the finished work.

We propose that the execution of the first fresco-painting should be committed to William Dyce, A.R.A., and that the subject selected should be that of the cartoon exhibited by him, viz.: "The Baptism of Ethelbert," with any alterations in the details that may appear to Mr. Dyce advisable.

Meanwhile, being desirous to afford opportunities for the further practice of fresco-painting, and for the cultivation of the style of design which is fitted for it, we propose that a hall in your Majesty's Palace at Westminster, called the upper waiting hall, should be decorated with fresco-paintings; provided the architectural arrangements and the light should, on the completion of the apartment, be found to be adapted for the purpose; and we propose that the subjects of such paintings should have reference to the general character of decoration intended for the locality. We beg leave to commit the execution of five of the said works to Charles West Cope, A.R.A., John Calleott Horsley, John Rogers Herbert, A.R.A., Joseph Severn, and John Tenniel, junior, who, we consider, have distinguished themselves as designers or as fresco-painters in one or more of the various exhibitions that have taken place with reference to the decoration of the Palace at Westminster."

The twelve windows in the House of Lords, each with eight compartments for figures, will contain illustrations in stained glass of the Royal line.

The competition in oil-painting will take place in June, 1847, when "three premiums of 500*l.* each, three premiums of 300*l.* each, and three premiums of 200*l.* each, will be given to the artists, who shall furnish oil-paintings, which shall be deemed worthy of one or other of the said premiums by judges to be appointed to decide on the relative merit of the works."

Mr. Eastlake supplies a paper fourteen pages in length, on the "Styles and Methods of Painting suited to the Decoration of Public Buildings."

"The materials and dimensions of works of art," says Mr. Eastlake, "and the situations and lights for which they may be intended, are termed *external conditions*, as distinguished from the character of subjects, the aims of individual artists, the tendencies of general taste and similar influences. The former class only, as affording definite grounds for investigation and as suggesting practical inferences, can here be considered.* Whatever be the external conditions, it is essential that the visible impression of the work should, under the circumstances, be as complete as possible. To insure this, not only the executive means, but the qualities to be represented still require to be adapted or selected accordingly as conditions vary. Such methods and resources constitute, in each case, a specific and appropriate *style*; the criterion of which is, that the amount of excellence resulting from it is unattainable in the same degree by any other means. The question respecting the relation of painting to external conditions is not unimportant in considering the tendencies and claims of different schools. In general, the great masters seem to have inquired what the outward resources at their command could best effect. Such a habit, instead of confining, was rather calculated to enlarge their invention and to vary its forms. The result of their labours is the sufficient ground of the world's admiration; but their docility cannot be duly appreciated without a reference to the local circumstances under which they worked."

When inquiring into the principles which regulate the varieties of style, causes of *indistinctness*, and distinctness are treated of. "It may be sometimes requisite even for persons of cultivated judgment to bear in mind that the excellences on which the highest reputation of great artists is founded are to be sought not so much in the beauty of parts as in the grand or tasteful arrangement of the combined work, in the harmonious relation of entire masses, and the grace of entire forms. These qualities, which suppose the labour of the mind because they have reference to a whole, have ever constituted the worthiest criterions of merit, in the practice of the arts.

The influence of conditions, similar to those in question, on every department of painting, may be traced in the works of great artists; for, from whatever cause the sense of vision is imperfectly addressed, the selection both of qualities in nature and of the technical means fitted to represent them, will be influenced accordingly. But before pursuing the inquiry, it may be desirable to state the elementary facts connected with visible distinctness, since these, though familiar in reference to nature, are more complex in relation to works of art when seen under particular circumstances. They have been defined as follows: an object in nature can only be apparent, by differing in its visible attributes from what surrounds it. The chief causes of this distinctness are—difference of position; of mere magnitude; of light and shade; of form; and of colour. Accordingly these attributes constitute the general resources of the artist; but it will be for him to inquire which of those means are more especially calculated, under any extraordinary conditions, to produce a result which shall satisfy the eye."

"The instances are rare, and not always successful, in which extensive surfaces, whether on canvass or on walls, have been covered with masses of low half light and deep shade. Such masses, as is well known, are especially ill adapted for fresco, on account of its tendency to reflect light only from its surface."

"The unfitness of masses of extreme shade in paintings of considerable dimensions (without reference to the material) is explained by the fact that the distance at which the work requires to be viewed tends to obliterate the fainter lights and reflections in such masses, thus changing depth to flat obscurity.* In subjects which require gloom, it is still essential that the indistinctness should be felt to be intentional, and not to be the result of such distance. The size of the work should admit of the spectator being so placed as to see all that the artist intended to be seen."

"Next to the great requisite that each mode of representation should rest chiefly on its own resources, the works of great artists teach the principle, that the noblest object of imitation should always be the nearest to nature. In sculpture, and in painting when employed to represent human actors, this noblest object is life, with its attributes of action and thought. When the field for displaying this quality is even confined to a head, it is still required that no circumstance represented should surpass it in completeness of imitation. Rarely in the works of the best Greek sculptors or in those of the excellent modern painters does an inanimate object exceed in truth the representation of the living surface. The contrivances with a view to insure this subordination are, necessarily, most daring in sculpture, in which certain qualities are in danger of being confounded with reality. It will generally be found that the employment of conventional methods (as opposed to the more direct truth of representation) increases in proportion as objects are easily imitable, and, consequently, in danger of interfering with the higher aim."

We close our extracts from the report with the following prescription for using caoutchouc on walls, so as to prevent the possibility of damp or saline impurities reaching fresco paintings, or other decorations on walls, submitted by Mr. J. Collard Drake:—

"Cover or float the brick-wall proposed to be decorated with *compo* or cement. When this is set—and in fine weather it will become sufficiently so in a week—varnish or paint it over with two substantial coats of caoutchouc dissolved in naptha. On this surface, and with the same solution of caoutchouc, attach a coarsely-woven rope fabric, varnished at the back in the same manner. This material will, instead of the surface of bricks or lath, be the recipient for the first or rough coat of plaster."

* It has not been thought necessary again to consider the question of the adaptation of style in painting to that of the architecture of the new Houses of Parliament. It may be sufficient to repeat that the Tudor style in England is coeval with the best examples of Italian art, and that if Raphael had accepted the invitation of Henry VIII. to visit this country, edifices erected during or before the reign of that monarch might have been adorned with the great artist's works. Second Report, p. 65. Compare First Report, p. 19.

* It has been before observed, that although an object may be increased in magnitude to any extent, in proportion to its distance, and in order to accommodate the spectator, yet the forms of light and shade cannot be increased beyond a certain point, and that point is supposed to be already attained in pictures requiring to be seen near. Not only is force not to be increased in proportion as distance increases, it is unavoidably diminished by it, in consequence of interposed air.

ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

LOOKING through a file of Australian papers (*South Australian Register*, and the *Adelaide Observer*), we extracted a few notes on our own subjects, which may interest some of our readers.

"It is useless to conceal the fact that most of the old cottages *existing* about Adelaide have become ruinous; indeed, nearly the whole of the early erections are destined to decay within the limits of the leases, short as they confessedly are. There are many self-evident reasons for this state of things. Most of the old erections were built of that most dirty and contemptible of all the colonial inventions, "pisé," or rammed earth. There never was in this city more than one good house of such material, and that must have cost as much to make it what it is, and to preserve it, as would have paid for more durable materials. However, "*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*." The practice is now extinct here, never (it is to be hoped) to be revived.

The earlier brick houses were very little better, the bricks being of a pale, half-burnt description. They were, as a chemist would say, "soluble in water;" and the walls soon ceased to afford any support to the doors and window frames, or inferior fittings; and the majority of them are, as might be expected, in a very unsatisfactory state. In short, every smart gale diminishes the number even of these "tenements of brick." In earlier days, as well as recently, much better bricks might have been made; but there are few London or Cowley brickmakers here, and such makers alone seem to possess the art of making hard and durable bricks in perfection. The practice of the art may be simple enough—but it must be acquired.

Few of the wooden houses sent out from Britain answered the expectations of the importers or fulfilled the promises of the builders; and many of those which still survive and are inhabited are also infested, being very complete and convenient repositories for many of the noxious and *innocuous* tribes. The matched linings of some of the houses secure the free tenantry from every act of ejectment short of pulling down, and defy the endeavours of the most clever and industrious scourers.

Few of the early stone-built houses will pass the scrutiny of the surveyor without prompt condemnation, built as they were of round, rubbly lime stone, and with untempered mortar, and badly founded. There is no dependance to be placed upon such erections. There are houses enough of this genus still extant, to make one rejoice that matters have at length undergone a change for the benefit of the rising generation. The use of squared stone and better bricks and mortar has now become general, and houses are being built generally that will survive a twenty-one years' lease, if not from generation to generation. Indeed, under the present superintendence of practical and professional men, buildings are being put up which would do credit to English cities.

But speaking of professional superintendence, it must excite a little surprise that one of the best buildings yet put up in Adelaide should have been designed and executed without the aid of a professed architect. The South Australian Bank also exhibits a specimen unrivalled in beauty and simplicity. St. John's Church, with its noble roof and beautifully carved arches in the Gothic style, is admirable both in plan and execution. There is, in short, a superabundance of talent both for design and execution; and it cannot be doubted that a superior style of building will henceforth become general."

Endeavours are being made to obtain better

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